

A faint, light blue background illustration of a large, spreading tree with a thick trunk and a wide canopy, centered behind the text.

**Fawn McGee**

*NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection*  
Director, Blue Acres Buyout Program  
Bureau Chief, NJ State Land Acquisition

A faint, light blue background illustration of a field or grassy area at the bottom of the slide.





# October 29, 2012: Superstorm Sandy Strikes

- 365,000 homes damaged
- 2.8M homes w/o power
- 100,000 downed trees
- 600 roads/tunnels closed
- 80 water/wastewater plants inoperable
- 1,400 vessels sunk/displaced
- 6.2M Cu Yds of housing materials and debris removed
- 100,000 Cu Yds of debris from waterways
- \$382M in commercial property damages







# A Densely Populated & Flood-prone State

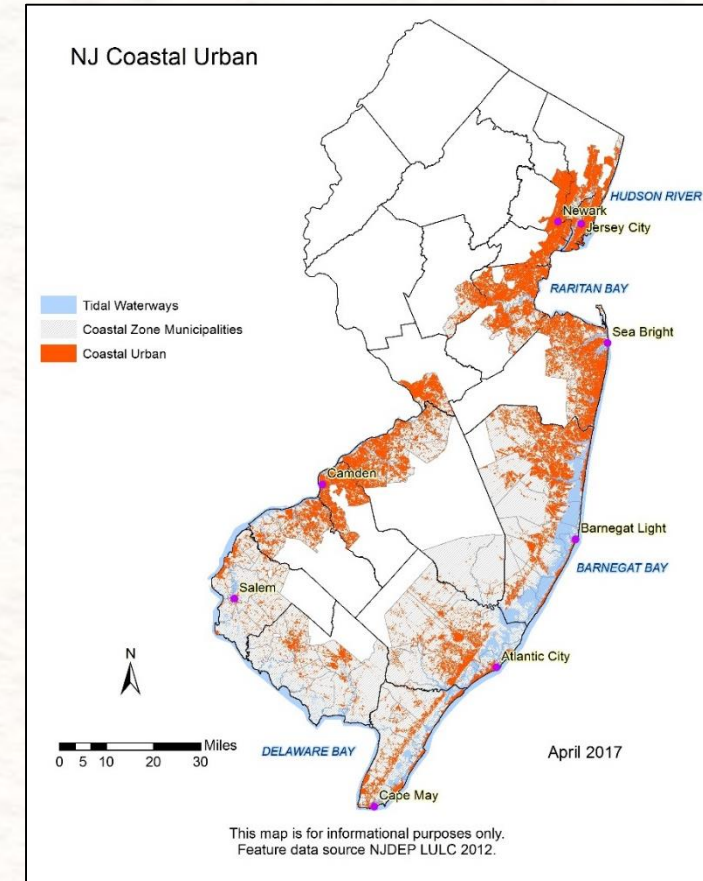






# Climate Changing is Affecting New Jersey

- Rising Sea Level
- Storm Intensity Increasing
- Coastal Erosion
- Development causing storm water run-off
- Sunny-day (nuisance) flooding



\*FEMA, August 4, 2004





# Rebuild, Raise or Rescue?

- Rebuild: Saves the ratable
- Elevation: Saves the house
- Buyouts: Saves the family
- Local communities break the cycle of reacting to floods by improving flood storage
- Decreases risk (and cost) for first-responders
- Improves CRS and makes the greater community more resilient
- Open space increases property values for overall community







# Blue Acres: Rescuing Families Since 1995

- Mission: To purchase and remove clusters of homes from willing homeowners and strengthen flood mitigation.
- Established in 1995 with \$15M ballot referendum.
- Arm of Green Acres for flooding buyouts
- Initial acquisitions: 100% State-funded.
- First FEMA funding: 2010.
- 2013: Tasked with acquiring up to 1,300 homes in the wake of Superstorm Sandy.

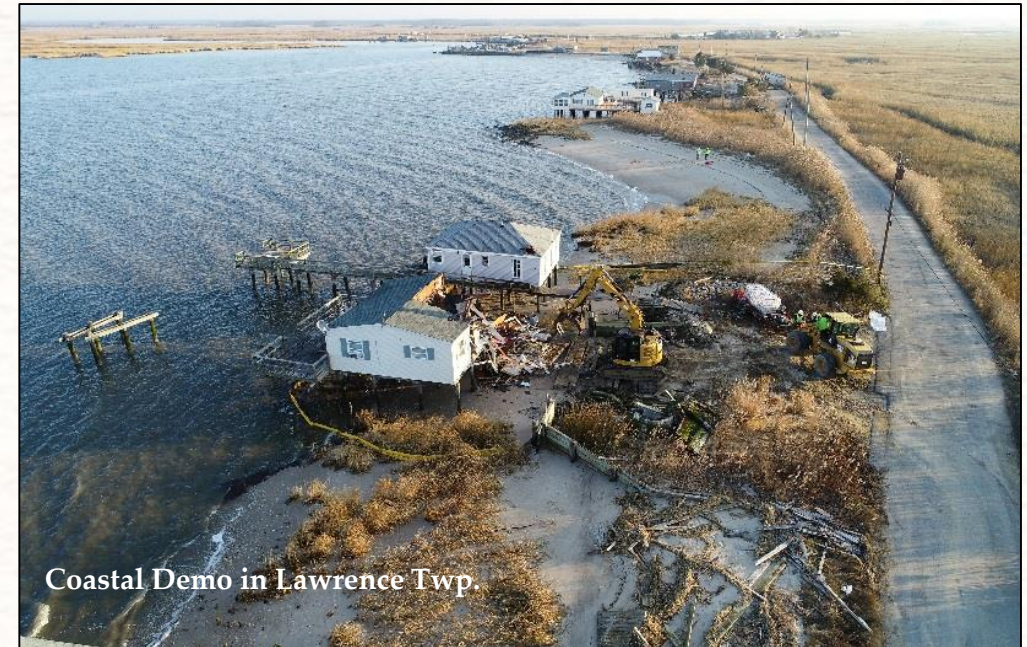






# Criteria for a Blue Acres Buyout

1. Flood damage from Superstorm Sandy or repeated flooding
2. Clusters of homes, purchased at *pre-storm* values.
3. Willing sellers/support of local officials
4. Opportunity for significant impact on environment, or public health, safety, and welfare
5. Repeated NFIP claims
6. Benefit-cost analysis





# Coastal vs. Inland Buyouts



Pre-demo in Downe

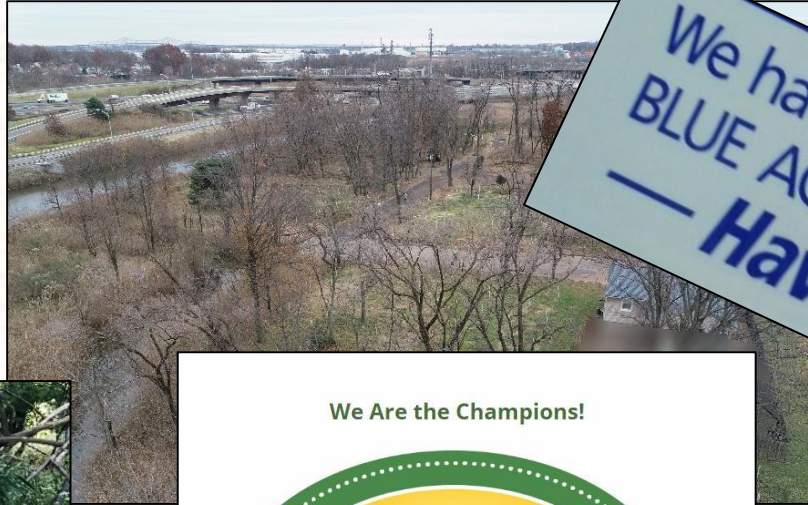


Post-demo in Downe





# Post-Demo Restoration in Progress







# Program Achievements\*

- Active in 16 municipalities (9 counties) throughout the State
- Secured federal funding for 1,021 homes:
  - 965 offers made
  - 741 offers accepted
  - 688 sales closed
  - 608 properties demolished
- >\$5.7 M in debt forgiveness for 69 families
- National recognition



\*As of 5/10/2019





# What We Learned Along the Way

- Buy-in from local government is critical
- Grassroots
- Strong relationships with federal funding agencies
- A consistent (but flexible) process
- Established procedures
- Compassionate case managers



Wayne, 2011  
Fairfield, 2011





# Key Takeaways

- Strike now: Don't wait for the next disaster.
- Help residents and officials understand the benefits of buyouts.
- Cultivate motivated homeowners to drive critical grassroots efforts.
- Assign compassionate case managers who can connect on an emotional level.
- Plan for the long haul.







*Thank you!*

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